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Helms, the Shah and the CIA

THERE IS A CERTAIN irony in the fact that Richard Helms will go to Iran as the American ambassador 20 years after the agency he now heads organized and directed the overthrow of the regime then in power in Teheran. The tale is worth recounting if only because of the changes in two decades which have affected the Central Intelligence Agency as well as American foreign policy.

Helms first went to work at the CIA in 1947 and he came up to his present post as director through what is generally called the "department of dirty tricks." However, there is nothing on the public record to show that he personally had a hand in the overthrow of the Communist backed and/or oriented regime of Premier Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953, an action that returned the Shah to his throne. One can only guess at the wry smile that must have come to the Shah's face when he first heard that President Nixon was proposing to send the CIA's top man to be the American envoy.

The Iranian affair, and a similar CIA action in Guatemala the following year, are looked upon by old hands at

has squeezed more and more revenue from the Westerners.

In his 1963 book, "The Craft of Intelligence," published after he left CIA, Dulles wrote that, when in both Iran and Guatemala it "became clear" that a Communist state was in the making, "support from outside was given to loyal anti-Communist elements." In a 1965 NBC television documentary on "The Science of Spying" Dulles said: "The government of Mossadegh, if you recall history, was overthrown by the action of the Shah. Now, that we encouraged the Shah to take that action I will not deny." Miles Copeland, an ex-CIA operative in the Middle East, wrote in his book, "The Game of Nations," that the Iranian derring-do was called "Operation Ajax." He credited Roosevelt with "almost single-handedly" calling the "pro-Shah forces on to the streets of Teheran" and supervising "their riots so as to oust" Mossadegh.

TODAY THE IRAN to which Helms will go after he leaves the CIA is a stable, well armed and well oil-financed regime under the Shah's command which has mended its fences with Moscow without hurting its close relationship with Washington. The Shah has taken full advantage of the changes in East-West relations from the Cold War to today's milder climate.

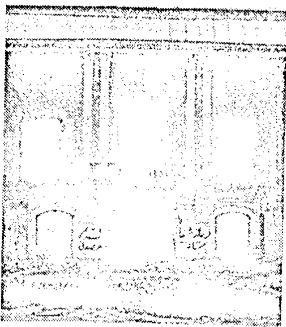
While Iran and Guatemala were the high points of covert CIA Cold War activity, there were plenty of other successful enterprises that fell short of changing government regimes. Today the CIA, humiliated by the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco it planned and ran, has withdrawn from such large scale affairs as Iran, save for its continuing major role in the no longer "secret war in Laos." The climate of today would not permit the United States to repeat the Iranian operation, or so one assumes with the reservation that President Nixon (who was Vice President at the time of Iran) loves surprises.

The climate of 1953, however, was very different and must be taken into account in any judgment. Moscow then was fishing in a great many troubled waters and among them was Iran. It was probably true, as Allen Dulles said on that 1965 TV show, that "at no time has the CIA engaged in any political activity or any intelligence that was not approved at the highest level." It was all part of a deadly "game of nations." Richard Disell, who ran the U-2 program and the Bay of Pigs, was asked on that TV show about the morality of CIA activities. "I think," he replied, that "the morality of . . . shall we call it for short, cold war . . . is so infinitely easier than the morality of almost any kind of hot war that I never encountered this as a serious problem."

PERHAPS the philosophy of the Cold War years and the CIA role were best put by Dulles in a letter that he wrote me in 1961. Excerpts from his then forthcoming book had appeared in Harper's and I had suggested to him some further revelations he might include in the book. He wrote about additions he was making: "This includes more on Iran and Guatemala and the problems of policy in action when there begins to be evidence that a country is slipping and Communist take-over is threatened. We can't wait for an engraved invitation to come and give aid."

There is a story, too, that Winston Churchill was so pleased by the operation in Iran that he proffered the George Cross to Kim Roosevelt. But the CIA wouldn't let him have the decoration. So Churchill commented to Roosevelt: "I would be proud to have served under you" in such an operation. That remark, Roosevelt is said to have replied, was better than the decoration.

Helms doubtless would be the last to say so out loud but I can imagine his reflecting that, if it hadn't been for what Dulles, Kim Roosevelt and the others did in 1953, he would not have the chance to present his credentials to a Shah still on the peacock throne in 1973.



1953: Teheran rioting that overthrew the government left the United States Point Four office with gaping holes for windows and doors.

the agency as high points of a sort in the Cold War years. David Wise and Thomas B. Ross have told the Iranian story in their book, "The Invisible Government," and the CIA boss at the time, Allen Dulles, conceded in public after he left the government that the United States had had a hand in what occurred.

IRAN IS NEXT DOOR to the Soviet Union. In 1951 Mossadegh, who confused Westerners with his habits of weeping in public and running government business from his bed, nationalized the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Co. and seized the Abadan refinery. The West boycotted Iranian oil and the country was thrown into crisis. Mossadegh "connived," as Wise and Ross put it, with Tudeh, Iran's Communist party, to bolster his hand. The British and Americans decided he had to go and picked Gen. Fazollah Zahedi to replace him. The man who stage-managed the job on the spot was Kermit "Kim" Roosevelt (who also had a hand in some fancy goings-on in Egypt), grandson of T.R. and seventh cousin of F.D.R., and now a Washingtonian in private business.

Roosevelt managed to get to Teheran and set up underground headquarters. A chief aide was Brig. Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, who, as head of the New Jersey state police, had become famous during the Lindbergh baby kidnaping case. Schwarzkopf had reorganized the Shah's police force and he and Roosevelt joined in the 1953 operation. The Shah dismissed Mossadegh and named Zahedi as Premier but Mossadegh arrested the officer who brought the bad news. The Teheran streets filled with rioters and a scared Shah fled first to Baghdad and then to Rome. Dulles flew to Rome to confer with him. Roosevelt ordered the Shah's backers into the streets, the leftists were arrested by the army and the Shah returned in triumph. Mossadegh went to jail. In time a new international oil consortium took over Anglo-Iranian which operates to this day, though the Shah

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